



Centre for  
International Cooperation  
and Security

## **Armed violence and poverty in Sri Lanka**

A mini case study for the Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative  
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## The Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has commissioned the Centre for International Cooperation and Security (CICS) at Bradford University to carry out research to promote understanding of how and when poverty and vulnerability is exacerbated by armed violence. This study programme, which forms one element in a broader “Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative”, aims to provide the full documentation of that correlation which DFID feels is widely accepted but not confirmed. It also aims to analyse the **processes** through which such impacts occur and the **circumstances** which exacerbate or moderate them. In addition it has a practical policy-oriented purpose and concludes with programming and policy recommendations to donor government agencies.

This report on Sri Lanka is one of 13 case studies (all of the case studies are available at [www.bradford.ac.uk/cics](http://www.bradford.ac.uk/cics)). This research draws upon secondary data sources including existing research studies, reports and evaluations commissioned by operational agencies, and early warning and survey data where this has been available. These secondary sources have been complemented by interviews with government officers, aid policymakers and practitioners, researchers and members of the local population. The analysis and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views or policy of DFID or the UK government.

## Executive summary

### Macro-economic effects of the war

The case of Sri Lanka exhibits certain exceptional qualities in that its economy grew on average faster during the war than in the pre-war period. In addition, its growth compares favourably with other developing countries not at war. However, there have been considerable fluctuations in Sri Lanka's growth rates that correspond with episodes of armed violence in the country. The Sri Lankan economy could have grown at a much higher rate if it did not have to bear the costs of the war. In contrast with other foreign-exchange constrained economies at war, Sri Lanka's exports did not drop dramatically during the conflict, though greater investment levels in the absence of conflict would have led to higher exports. It is significant, however, that the major export-earning industries are concentrated outside the war area and so have been fairly isolated from disruptions. In contrast, the war has had a severe impact on tourist earnings and employment. Others assert that the lost potential economic growth of Sri Lanka is greater than has been acknowledged and that high defence expenditure is the primary cause of economic problems. Defence expenditure as a proportion of the GDP in Sri Lanka is the second highest in South Asia and has surpassed social expenditures since 1995. Peaks in expenditure match up with periods of heightened violence and security problems.

### SALW, disarmament, demobilisation, crime and violence

The question of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration into society of ex-combatants from both sides of the conflict is one of the most significant political and developmental issues currently facing Sri Lanka. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is about to launch a reintegration programme for a limited number of ex-combatants and their families from both sides of the conflict, intended as a pilot for a larger future programme should a political settlement be achieved. Problematic categories of combatants not covered by the programme are deserters from both the army and the LTTE; retired LTTE members; certain categories of child soldiers; the Home Guards and the National Armed Reserve; and members of Tamil groups opposed to the LTTE, state-funded and armed. In the design of demobilisation and reintegration programmes, these potentially vulnerable categories need to be targeted as well as those more immediately visible. For all ex-combatants the problems of finding employment, supporting their families and settling into civilian roles are considerable but for female ex-soldiers there are some gender-specific issues. Reintegration programmes need to address gendered issues in a more radical way including grappling with the needs of female ex-combatants in an emancipatory way rather than reinforcing expected gender roles and inequalities.

Sri Lanka also faces the integrally related problem of the threat to society posed by ex-combatants. Particularly troublesome is the category of Sri Lankan state military deserters, of whom it is estimated there are over 50,000. Evidence from other contexts suggests that reducing one type of violence can actually lead to an increase in other types, particularly when there is a problem with small arms and light weapons left over from a conflict – so ceasefires and peace processes often witness an increase in economic and inter-personal crime. This appears to be occurring in Sri Lanka, where violence all over the country seems to be on the increase. Further, other contexts also suggest that in the post-conflict era the wartime proliferation of small arms and light weapons contributes to a rise in levels of domestic violence against women. Data in this area appears to be lacking in Sri Lanka and is

vitally needed. However, existing local initiatives that combat domestic and sexual violence should be supported and funded.

### **Internally Displaced People (IDPs)**

Over the course of the conflict more than 800,000 Tamils were displaced within Sri Lanka, over 84,000 sought refuge in India and hundreds of thousands more in other parts of the world, making up one of the world's largest IDP populations and one of the western world's largest groups of asylum seekers. For IDPs without recourse to family support or the opportunity to migrate abroad, camps ('welfare centres') became the only option. Poverty in the camps is often severe, residents suffer health problems and their basic needs are often not met. The main bulk of the IDP population live in the Vanni and the Jaffna peninsula, which have been particularly badly impacted by the war, but there are significant numbers of IDPs in the east too. The economic marginalisation of the area as a result of the war, the widespread exodus and displacement of skilled workers and educated people, and the huge devastation caused to the infrastructure has had significant impacts in terms of poverty. Within IDP camps access to employment has been sporadic, food and health care are significant problems and maintaining good standards of education has been difficult. IDPs in the eastern camps seem to have better nutrition and health than those in the north, but often a worse relationship with the security forces, especially in the Trincomalee area.

Women have experienced more continuity than men in regard to their normal gender tasks and identity, but have also changed gender relations as well – many women work in paid employment outside the camps, though some have also suffered resistance to these changes by men. The steps some IDP women have made and continue to make towards greater agency and empowerment should be encouraged and supported by development agencies, but ongoing dialogue with IDP men is a necessary part of this process to ensure that women do not suffer a backlash from men in their own communities. Finally, the steady flow to the north-east since the ceasefire of spontaneously returning IDPs, refugees and migrants is a significant issue affecting Sri Lanka's potential for development. The pressures on government services and UN and aid agency assistance for returnees are significant. Many attempt to return to their land and homes on their own initiative, where water, sanitary and other services and infrastructure may be inadequate or non-existent and the prospects for income generation are grim. Land disputes are also likely. One of the biggest problems faced by returnees is that of anti-personnel landmines, despite the partial de-mining done so far.

### **Female-Headed Households, Vulnerable Women and Livelihood Strategies**

With large numbers of men killed or lost through migration or abandonment throughout the war there has been a significant increase in female-headed households. This increase is seen primarily in the Tamil communities in the north-east but some Sinhalese communities in the south also now have greater numbers of female-headed households, as a result of the violent JVP insurrection in 1987-89. This has serious and gendered implications for families, communities and society more broadly. Tamil culture accords a very low status to widows and women living alone without a male family member are looked upon with suspicion and suffer various forms of social exclusion. A significant problem for lone women trying to support themselves and their children is the fact that even if they do manage to find some source of income generation, people in their communities often assume that this money must come from prostitution. Organisations such as the Centre for Women's Development that help women establish livelihoods, including training them in unconventional skills, should be supported.

**MAP OF SRI LANKA**, showing provinces and major towns, produced by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Available from the University of Texas Library Online: [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/sri\\_lanka\\_pol01.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/sri_lanka_pol01.jpg)



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# 1. Introduction

The economic effects of armed conflict depend, in part, on the nature and duration of the conflict and the pre-existing conditions in the relevant economy. Outcomes should therefore vary. Empirical evidence shows large economic and social costs in major civil wars, over and above direct war deaths. Economic costs are witnessed in falls in GDP, food production, and exports.<sup>1</sup> Meghan O'Sullivan points out that the economic experience of Sri Lanka seems to differ quite dramatically from that of other countries at war since its economy grew on average faster during the war than in the pre-war period, rather than contracting. Its growth also compares favourably with other developing countries not at war. However, O'Sullivan notes that there were considerable fluctuations in Sri Lanka's growth rates that correspond with episodes of armed violence in the country. For example the period of the second *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP – People's Liberation Front) rebellion, 1987 to 1989, witnessed a particularly visible decline in growth. The period from the beginning of war in 1983 to the suppression of the JVP in 1989 was one of the slowest periods of growth in post-independence Sri Lanka, with annual growth averaging 3.7 per cent. O'Sullivan suggests, therefore, that Sri Lanka has managed to mitigate the negative effects of conflict but not escape them.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Sri Lankan economy has grown during the war it has been argued that the economy could have grown at a much higher rate if it did not have to bear the costs of the war.<sup>3</sup> War often hampers a country's export sector yet, in contrast with other foreign-exchange constrained economies at war, Sri Lanka's exports did not drop dramatically during the conflict, though greater investment levels in the absence of conflict would have led to higher exports. This apparent exceptionalism of Sri Lanka, however, is less surprising when one considers that the major export-earning industries are concentrated outside the war area and so have been fairly isolated from disruptions.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the war did have a severe impact on earnings and employment created by the tourist industry in Sri Lanka. Tourist earnings grew by over 20 per cent per annum 1978 to 1982, then began dropping after the 1983 ethnic riots until by the late 1980s the total number of tourists visiting the country was half that of 1982. Tourism then began increasing but fell again by 25 per cent after terrorist attacks in Colombo in 1996.<sup>5</sup> It is a little early to tell the real effect of the current ceasefire on tourism but certainly tourism to the country does seem to be on the increase again and a few visitors are even travelling to the north-east.

Muttukrishna Sarvananthan argues that high defence expenditure is the primary cause of Sri Lanka's economic problems. He maintains that the lost potential economic growth of Sri Lanka as a result of the war is actually greater than has generally been acknowledged (due to the way such things are measured and what is included and excluded in statistics from year to year); defence expenditure has surpassed social expenditures since 1995; defence expenditure as a proportion of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Sri Lanka is the second highest in South Asia (after Pakistan) and is high in comparison to some other war-torn countries; and labour-intensive military strategy has been economically costly.<sup>6</sup> Defence expenditure as a percentage of the GDP was only 1 per cent in 1982, before the war began, but since the mid-1980s this figure has vastly increased. Certain peaks in expenditure match up with periods of

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, Huang and Wang in Stewart and FitzGerald, 2001a.

<sup>2</sup> O'Sullivan in Stewart and FitzGerald, 2001b, pp. 181-183.

<sup>3</sup> CEPA, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> O'Sullivan in Stewart and FitzGerald, 2001b, pp. 189-190.

<sup>5</sup> O'Sullivan in Stewart and FitzGerald, 2001b, pp. 190-191.

<sup>6</sup> Sarvananthan, 2003b.

heightened violence and security problems – in 1988, during the JVP rebellion, defence expenditure was almost 5 per cent of GDP and in 1995 and 1996, when the government launched an intensive military operation to retake the Jaffna peninsula from the LTTE, expenditure was respectively around 5.4 and 6 per cent.<sup>7</sup> Since 1996 it has averaged around 4.3 per cent.<sup>8</sup> Annual defence expenditures as a proportion of the total public expenditure generally increased from 11.2 per cent in 1991 to 14.3 per cent in 1995 then jumped significantly to an average of around 17 per cent for the years 1996 to 2000.<sup>9</sup> O'Sullivan suggests a further example of Sri Lankan exceptionalism when she points out that during the war years she examines, 1983 to 1995, Sri Lanka maintained social expenditure in excess of pre-war levels.<sup>10</sup> However, defence expenditure has been growing steadily. Whilst in the early 1990s defence and social expenditures remained roughly equal as percentages of the overall public expenditure, from 1995 defence expenditure began outstripping social expenditure. During the years 1991 to 2001, defence expenditure versus social expenditure peaked in 2000 when defence expenditure made up 17 per cent and social expenditure 9.8 per cent of the total public expenditure.<sup>11</sup> However, it should also be noted that social expenditure as a percentage of the public expenditure has actually remained reasonably stable 1991-2001; it is the percentage spent on defence that has significantly increased.

This report is primarily concerned with the household level, particularly in regard to gendered impacts, and does not address the macro or meso-level impacts of armed violence in Sri Lanka beyond the brief mention of some key macro-level impacts provided above. This paper also focuses on the effects of war violence and other types of violence that have stemmed from or been contributed to by the war and consequent availability of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The report begins with a brief outline of the Sri Lankan conflict then moves on to the initial reconstruction of the north of the country. It then addresses the problem of SALW in Sri Lanka in relation to questions of disarmament, demobilisation, crime and violence. The report then focuses on internally displaced people (IDPs) before looking at female-headed households, vulnerable women and livelihood strategies. It ends with some recommendations for action.

## 2. Outline of the Sri Lankan conflict

Sri Lanka has an ethnically diverse population of about 17.5 million. The ethnic breakdown of the population is around 74.6 per cent Sinhalese, 12.6 per cent Sri Lankan Tamil, 7.4 per cent Muslim, 5.5 per cent Indian Tamil, with other small minorities.<sup>12</sup> However, Chris Smith claims that as a result of the war Tamils now make up only 8 per cent of the population.<sup>13</sup> Sinhalese are largely Buddhist and Tamils Hindu, both with a Christian minority. Since the late 1970s ethnically Tamil groups have been fighting against the predominantly Sinhala-Buddhist state (and Sinhalese and Muslim civilians) for an independent state in the north and east of Sri Lanka; the war is taken as beginning in 1983. The most powerful militant Tamil separatist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or the Tigers), attained hegemony in the mid-1980s by destroying its competitors. It is well known that women have

<sup>7</sup> O'Sullivan in Stewart and FitzGerald, 2001b, p. 192.

<sup>8</sup> Sarvananthan, 2003b.

<sup>9</sup> Sarvananthan, 2003b.

<sup>10</sup> O'Sullivan in Stewart and FitzGerald, 2001b, pp. 198-199.

<sup>11</sup> Sarvananthan, 2003b, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel, 2001, p. 185. 'Indian Tamils' are the descendents of south Indians brought over as indentured labour by the British to work British-owned plantations in the central hills in the mid-nineteenth century. 'Muslims' are considered a separate ethnic group in Sri Lanka.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, 2003, p. 3.

been pivotally involved as combatants in the Tamil groups, particularly in the LTTE. In 1983 the organisation founded a special section for women called the *Vituthalai Pulikal Munani* (Women's Front of the Liberation Tigers) and they began battle training in Tamil Nadu (India) in 1985, also being trained in Jaffna (Sri Lanka) from 1987. Their first battle was against the Sri Lankan military in 1986. By 1989 this unit had its own leadership structure.<sup>14</sup> From the mid-1980s the Tigers have aggressively recruited women into their fighting cadres and after 1990 the proportion of female fighters increased rapidly. The women's military wing is a well-organised and highly disciplined force. The LTTE's naval force, the Sea Tigers, and its suicide squad, the Black Tigers, contain large numbers of women. The number of female combatants is naturally a military secret but estimates vary between about 15-20 per cent to one third of their core combat strength. At least 65,000 people have died as a result of the conflict between Tamil groups and the Sri Lankan state, two-thirds of whom were civilians, and hundreds of thousands more have been displaced or left the country as refugees and migrants. An agreement on a ceasefire was signed in February 2002 between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE and negotiations on a political settlement began, mediated by the Norwegian Government. Although at present the ceasefire is largely holding between the state military and the LTTE, political negotiations are stalled and currently on hold. The latest election of a government believed by many to be less committed to peace than its predecessor has caused some pessimism about the prospects of lasting peace. The peace process has been further challenged by serious internal divisions within the Sri Lankan Government since November 2003 and, since March 2004, violent disputes between the LTTE's northern leadership and dissenting elements of its eastern faction. In addition, there is currently serious ongoing political violence in the east. In July 2004 a further significant threat to the ceasefire was presented by a female suicide bomber in Colombo, who killed four policemen as well as herself. The LTTE deny culpability but are widely believed to have been responsible.

Alongside the war in the northeast, it is important to note that Sri Lanka has also been wracked by two other periods of armed violence in recent history: the insurrections against the state by the JVP in 1971 and, much more significantly, 1987-89. Although it is frequently described simply as an extremist Sinhala nationalist organisation, in reality the JVP appears to have been more like an authoritarian socialist group that used appeals to Sinhala nationalism in an instrumental fashion to garner mass support, and in fact after the July 1983 anti-Tamil riots a number of its members left because of their objections to the increasingly Sinhala nationalist bent of the party.<sup>15</sup> Sri Lanka did not have a state military until 1971, when the government created one and began using it internally in response to the JVP uprising.<sup>16</sup>

The 1987-89 insurrection is remembered as the most violent period in the history of the southern areas of independent Sri Lanka. The JVP took advantage of the government's preoccupation with the war in the north, waiting for crises to occur there to attack the army from behind, thus illustrating how armed violence can indirectly as well as directly stimulate further armed violence. This second JVP insurrection was eventually brutally crushed by the Sri Lankan state forces but at least 40,000 people died at the hands of both the JVP and the state, though some maintain the number was even higher. The JVP reformed in 1998, now claiming to be a legitimate, democratic political party that will not use violence to achieve its aims. It remains, however, opposed to the peace process.

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<sup>14</sup> Ann, 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Chandraprema, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> Chenoy, 1998.



### 3. Initial reconstruction in the North

Smith suggests that although the A9 highway from the south of Sri Lanka up to Jaffna is now open as a result of the ceasefire, there is insufficient infrastructure to transport enough aid and it will take a very long time and great effort to deliver humanitarian assistance to the neediest areas in Jaffna. The duration of the war and intensity of fighting in the Jaffna region has had a significant effect on human security.<sup>17</sup> Further, Sarvananthan contends that not many new productive activities have begun in the north-east since the ceasefire, despite fast rising trade with other parts of the country. He suggests that the major non-market impediments to economic growth in the north-east are the demarcation of high security zones by the Sri Lankan security forces, LTTE 'taxation' of local populations and those travelling to the north, and the general political and economic uncertainty.<sup>18</sup> However, my observations in the north of the country in June 2004 indicate that many positive changes have occurred since the early post-ceasefire period, the last time I was there:

- Kilinochchi, the LTTE's stronghold in the northern Vanni area, is today humming with construction and industry;
- Many businesses in Kilinochchi now have generator-powered electricity for part of the day and a government electricity supply is expected in the next few months;
- The A9 highway has been repaired with the help of World Bank money;
- The impact of the lifting of the government embargo on all manner of goods travelling into the Vanni, removed as a result of the ceasefire, is witnessed in the increased type and number of goods and services now available in the area;
- There appears to have been a significant re-growth of vegetation in the north, which was seriously affected by deforestation in the war.

Jaffna, too, shows signs of regeneration but the change is less stark than in Kilinochchi. One clearly visible (and welcome) development, however, was in the return of many Muslims and Muslim businesses to Jaffna – Muslims were forced out of the north in 1990 by the LTTE, leading to the displacement of almost 100,000 Muslims and the loss of their livelihoods.<sup>19</sup> However, beneath the surface many problems remain, unemployment and lack of livelihood opportunities being enormously significant. In the rural areas near Kilinochchi most people still live in desperate poverty, the majority without electricity or running water. Many families living in the Vanni were displaced from the Jaffna peninsula in the 1990s and have lost land, family members and access to their traditional occupations. The LTTE's business success is probably as significant as its military efficiency; the organisation owns and operates restaurants, small shops and businesses, and petrol stations all over the world, including within Sri Lanka itself. Within the Vanni area the LTTE is probably the largest employer and the majority of businesses in LTTE-controlled areas are run by the organisation, with varying degrees of formal connection. One of the most-frequented restaurants in Kilinochchi, for example, is LTTE-run and the vast majority of its staff are very young ex-LTTE members, released after serving their required four years on the understanding that should war break out again they will return to fight for the LTTE. This makes true demobilisation and reintegration elusive for these ex-combatants yet this may be the only chance they have at leaving the organisation. The LTTE, problematically, remains their main potential source of livelihood even after they have left armed activities.

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<sup>17</sup> Smith, 2003, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Sarvananthan, 2003a.

<sup>19</sup> Silva in Mayer et al., 2003.

#### 4. Small arms and light weapons: disarmament, demobilisation, crime and violence

In the wake of the February 2002 ceasefire between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, combatants on both sides of the conflict have been leaving their military positions and attempting to return to civilian life. The question of their disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration into society is one of the most significant political and developmental issues currently facing Sri Lanka. Despite the uncertain nature of the current situation and the lack of a political settlement, much of the Sinhalese public believes that the war against the LTTE has been won and that the decommissioning of LTTE weapons should begin as soon as possible. However, the LTTE appears to have no short-term or even longer-term intention of decommissioning its weapons or demobilising its cadres.<sup>20</sup> Indeed the organisation's de facto police force, the Eelam Police, is actively recruiting and in June 2004 local people in Kilinochchi told me that the Eelam Police pay a good wage, much better than they are likely to get working for the state. Female police officers are highly visible in the Kilinochchi area. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has noted that demobilisation of armed groups 'is only possible when there is some measure of disarmament. Similarly, the success of demobilization efforts is contingent upon effective rehabilitation of the former combatants and their integration into civilian life or a restructured army'. Disarmament (and demobilisation and reintegration) often has 'a symbolic and political importance beyond the sum of its parts'.<sup>21</sup> The issue of weapons decommissioning is a vital element in the politics of peace processes and this is no less the case in Sri Lanka, though as yet decommissioning has not rated very highly on the political agenda or in reconstruction and development efforts.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is about to launch a reintegration programme for a limited number of ex-combatants and their families from both sides of the conflict (50 per cent state forces and 50 per cent LTTE), intended as a pilot for a larger future programme should a political settlement be achieved.<sup>22</sup> This programme is highly unusual, if not unique for the IOM, in that it is being launched *before* a final or lasting political settlement has been reached and also in that no real prior progress has been made on disarmament. IOM views it as important to run the programme now in order to support the ongoing peace process, since vulnerable groups could pose a destabilising threat to the process. On the government side the IOM programme works with wounded ex-combatants, recently retired combatants, and war widows. The majority of LTTE participants in the programme are wounded rather than retired and the IOM is negotiating with the Tigers over whether they will give permission to absorb retired combatants. This is a contentious issue for the LTTE because of its history of being constantly ready to return to war if necessary and its subsequent hold on 'ex'-combatants who are still physically able. It is particularly problematic at the moment given the situation in the east, with many LTTE members spontaneously leaving due to the internal organisational split and, in particular, many child ex-soldiers now under the care of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The IOM would like to include people from those categories in the programme but cannot unless the LTTE gives them official release papers, which they are unwilling to do. Similarly, on the government side the IOM wants to include army deserters, especially important given the security risk they pose, but the army is reluctant to agree to this despite support from some

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<sup>20</sup> Smith, 2003, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> UNDP, 2002b, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Shantha Kulasekera, National Programme Officer, International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Colombo, June 2004. The programme is known as Reclaim – Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Sri Lanka through Assistance and Information Management.

government sectors. Further problematic categories of ex-combatants who cannot be absorbed by the programme include the Home Guards and the National Armed Reserve, both of which are forces set up and armed by the government with little or no military training and under dubious control, and Tamil groups opposed to the LTTE, which are now state-funded, and armed paramilitary groups – such as the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO).

For all ex-combatants (many of whom retain their weapons or sell them to civilians) the problems of finding employment, supporting their families and settling into civilian roles are considerable. For child ex-soldiers there are significant problems reintegrating into society and behaving as and being treated like ordinary children. Conversations with United Nations (UN) staff in Kilinochchi suggest that such children are sometimes stigmatised by local communities, compounding their psychological and often physical problems. For female ex-soldiers (highly significant within the LTTE though not nearly so much within the state forces) there are some gender-specific reintegration issues to be faced. My fieldwork in Sri Lanka in 2002 suggests that despite the high level of acceptance of and, indeed, pride in the female LTTE members on the part of the civilian Tamil community, they are often not viewed as suitable women to marry. For those who need or want to work in paid employment, whether married or not, female ex-combatants face not only the usual problems of finding employment that all ex-soldiers experience but also the fact that many of them now have expectations of a greater freedom of action and less conventional 'women's work' than other Tamil women may have, which may cause difficulties in certain communities.

From a gendered perspective there may be some problems with the IOM reintegration programme in regard to female ex-combatants, despite its efforts to be gender-aware in its project planning. The sustainability of the project and accountability to programme donors are central to the IOM. Since the project is a pilot, its success is vitally important. The programme works with ex-combatants on an individual needs basis, facilitating training and education and working with businesses to create employment opportunities. It advises participants but does not want to force them into certain types of training or employment. However, if a female ex-combatant wanted to engage in something that the IOM believed might create problems within the community, the assumption would be that this would fail so it would not be funded by the IOM,<sup>23</sup> rather than the organisation supporting these women in their attempts to change unequal gender relations within their lives and their society. This in part reflects the usual problem of actual needs on the ground not necessarily matching up exactly with the requirements and interests of funding bodies and agencies and the fact that success is often measured in narrow financial terms. But it also reflects the ongoing struggle to get development agencies to view gender relations as centrally important and address this effectively in their programmes. Sepali Kottegoda warns of the dangers of poverty alleviation programmes that in effect 'reinforce the expected gender roles of women and men and leave the issue of asymmetrical power relations within the family based households untouched'.<sup>24</sup> This warning is no less applicable to demobilisation and reintegration programmes.

As well as the question of how ex-combatants themselves experience their demobilisation from military forces, Sri Lanka faces the integrally related problem of the potential threat to society posed by ex-combatants, illustrating again the importance of reintegration programmes such as that of the IOM. Particularly troublesome in this regard is the category of Sri Lankan state military deserters, of whom it is estimated there are over 50,000. This is a

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Shantha Kulasekera, IOM.

<sup>24</sup> Kottegoda in CEPA/IMCAP/SLAAS, 2003, p. 184.

very large number given that the total membership of the state armed forces is around 150,000.<sup>25</sup> The problem of criminal army deserters is the subject of debate in Sri Lanka at present; in June 2004 there were a number of news reports about armed crimes apparently committed by such deserters. There is also the question of the Home Guards, the National Armed Reserve, and Tamil groups such as EPDP and TELO whose reintegration needs, as noted earlier, are not being met. Caroline Moser categorises violence on a continuum of political, economic and social, and contends that reducing one type of violence does not necessarily reduce other types – in fact, it may lead to an increase in instances of other types. She points out that after El Salvador's Peace Accords and the subsequent reduction in political violence, rates of murder and economic crime increased.<sup>26</sup> This pattern appears to be being replicated in Sri Lanka, where violence all over the country seems to be on the increase. Smith suggests that Sri Lankan society as a whole 'appears to have been incrementally brutalized'.<sup>27</sup>

Edward Laurance and Sarah Meek point out that 'the post-Cold War period has found many countries experiencing an increase in common crimes that can be directly traced to the availability of weapons' and note that this is often related to weapons left over from wars and not destroyed. 'Crime does not occur in a vacuum, and the poverty and relative deprivation of the populations explains a great deal of this crime wave. However, the use of military-style weapons has emboldened the disaffected and has added to the level of damage and insecurity in the communities involved'.<sup>28</sup> As Smith highlights, the growing number of state army deserters in Sri Lanka either take their weapons with them when they leave, or acquire them after they desert. After their desertion many become involved in opportunistic crime, organised crime groups, or political violence as bodyguards and enforcers for political leaders.<sup>29</sup> There also seems to be a problem of unknown proportions with sexual crimes committed by ex-soldiers.<sup>30</sup> Army deserters in possession of SALW 'are thought to be at the heart of Sri Lanka's current crime wave'.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, in the context of internal splintering within the LTTE between eastern cadres and the northern command, some eastern cadres 'are becoming rapidly criminalized and controlled by budding warlords and the incidence of kidnapping and extortion has grown significantly since the CFA [ceasefire agreement] was signed'.<sup>32</sup> The targets are often wealthy Muslim business people and traders, which is likely to contribute to the already problematic Tamil-Muslim relationship. Observers note that Sri Lanka has become a very violent society and the increase in organised crime is part of an overall increase in levels of violence across the island. Gang murders averaged 5.5 per year between 1990 and 1995 but this increased to an annual average of 33.8 between 1999 and 2000.<sup>33</sup> Political violence surrounding elections is also on the increase, particularly incidents involving firearms. However, tackling these issues is problematic in light of the significant gaps in relevant data. Smith asserts that the security forces and in particular the police do not appear to see the need for the collation of data and statistics that might reflect or illuminate a rise in the criminal use of illegal SALW.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, a Small Arms Commission is intended to be established in

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Shantha Kulasekera, IOM.

<sup>26</sup> Moser, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, 2003, p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> Laurance and Meek 1996, p. 18.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Shantha Kulasekera, IOM.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, 2003, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, 2003, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, 2003, p. 18.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, 2003.

Sri Lanka to take action on SALW issues and the proposal is currently being heard in parliament.<sup>35</sup>

Smith suggests that the government and security forces face a significant challenge in ensuring 'that the weapons that once fuelled conflict between the government and the LTTE do not come to feed other conflicts across the country, such as a violent resurgence of the [JVP]'.<sup>36</sup> However, what he does not explicitly address is the vital importance of examining the impact that the proliferation and availability of arms may be having on rates of interpersonal violence, especially domestic violence and sexual crimes (though he does note domestic violence is one of the types of violence that has increased countrywide). Evidence from other contexts suggests that in the post-conflict era, the wartime proliferation of small arms and light weapons contributes to a rise in levels of domestic violence against women, particularly (though not restricted to) incidents involving small arms. Political violence encouraged or supported in the context of war is transformed into interpersonal violence in 'peacetime'.<sup>37</sup> Data in this area appears to be lacking in Sri Lanka and is vitally needed. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is now trying to address the problem of gender-based and sexual violence and is attempting to build local capacities in this area, involving hospitals and the police in training.<sup>38</sup> There is likely to be a high rate of domestic violence in the conflict zones and more action needs to be taken in this area. Oxfam apparently does some work in the area of domestic violence in the east, as do local NGOs such as Suriya Women's Development Centre in Batticaloa, but there are no specific programmes by UK government agencies.<sup>39</sup> While in Colombo I saw a call for applications for an interagency training seminar for humanitarian workers on gender-based violence, run by the Gender-Based Violence Global Technical Support Project of the Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium, which is a small positive sign. The fact that so little has been established in the way of responding to sexual violence is extremely worrisome given the vulnerability of Tamil women in the conflict zones throughout the war to sexual attacks by the Sri Lankan military and police and the Indian Peacekeeping Force (present 1988-1990). Sexual violence against Tamil women has, in fact, been a motivating factor for women to enlist in the LTTE.<sup>40</sup>

## 5. Internally Displaced People

Smith contends that 'the duration of the war has had a gradual but discernible impact upon already vulnerable groups and upon development. From the IDP camps in the Jaffna peninsula to the Middle East employment recruitment offices in Colombo, there is barely a (poor) family in the country that remains untouched by the war'.<sup>41</sup> During the Sri Lankan war many civilians have been forced to leave their homes and towns or villages and have become internally displaced people<sup>42</sup>, living in extreme poverty and insecurity. Over the course of the conflict more than 800,000 Tamils were displaced within Sri Lanka, over 84,000 sought refuge in India and hundreds of thousands more in other parts of the world, making up one of the world's largest IDP populations and one of the western world's largest groups of asylum

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Steve Ainsworth, First Secretary (Development Advisor), British High Commission, Colombo, June 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, 2003, p. viii.

<sup>37</sup> Farr and Cukier in BICC, 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Jae Park, Associate Field Officer (Protection), UNHCR Satellite Office, Kilinochchi, June 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Steve Ainsworth, British High Commission.

<sup>40</sup> Interviews with 14 female LTTE members and ex-members, August and September 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Smith 2003, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> IDP figures given here are from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), which limits its statistics to those whom the UNHCR extends protection or assistance to.

seekers.<sup>43</sup> In all, over 1.5 million Sri Lankans have been uprooted by the civil war.<sup>44</sup> For IDPs without recourse to family support elsewhere and without the opportunity to migrate abroad, camps ('welfare centres') became the only option. Many IDPs have been displaced for over a decade. Poverty in the camps is often severe, residents suffer health problems and their basic needs are often not met. In July 2002, before the largest waves of spontaneous returns of IDPs after the ceasefire, there were an estimated 175,000 IDPs living in welfare centres.<sup>45</sup> In 2002 well over 250,000 IDPs spontaneously returned to their home areas and several hundred returnees from Tamil Nadu, India, spontaneously returned across the Palk Straits.<sup>46</sup> In 2003, 76,722 IDPs returned to their places of origin, which brought the number of spontaneous returns since the signing of the ceasefire to 345,734.<sup>47</sup> By the end of the third quarter of 2004 there were still 358,800 IDPs in Sri Lanka.<sup>48</sup> At the end of 2003 there remained 61,000 Tamil refugees in India<sup>49</sup> and at the present moment there are still approximately 122,000 Sri Lankan refugees around the world (including those in India).<sup>50</sup>

The main bulk of the IDP population live in the Vanni and the Jaffna peninsula, which have been particularly badly impacted by the war. Malnutrition, particularly in children, is common due to the war and the government's economic embargo (now lifted) against the transport of numerous basic goods, foods and medical supplies to the rebel-held areas in the north-east. UNICEF figures from 2003 suggest that in the Jaffna peninsula around 137,814 people are displaced of a population of 502,356. Of these, 17,669 people live in 144 welfare centres.<sup>51</sup> The economic marginalisation of the area as a result of the war, the widespread exodus and displacement of skilled workers and educated people, and the huge devastation caused to the infrastructure has had significant impacts in terms of poverty. Within the IDP camps access to enough employment to sustain the population has been sporadic, food and health care are significant problems and maintaining good standards of education has been very difficult. IDPs in the camps around Jaffna generally fall into the poorest category of people, 'who spend 80 per cent of their money on food but only acquire 80 per cent of the food intake required to prevent malnutrition'.<sup>52</sup> There has been a clear fall in education quality and output in Jaffna in recent years and there is a shortage of primary and English school teachers, especially in rural areas. Schools are ill-equipped and some classes are held in rough corrugated iron structures. The situation is similar in the Vanni region, which has also suffered disproportionately due to the war and its position as the LTTE's military headquarters; real and immediately visible poverty and suffering is clear in the Vanni. The health sector is in similar disarray and in rural areas there are now almost no medical or paramedical personnel.

In the east the population is more ethnically mixed than the Jaffna peninsula and it is an area of serious ethnic tension. Many Tamils fled the region, leaving behind businesses and farms. Muslim traders have filled the gaps, exacerbating tensions between Tamils and Muslims, and with the return of Tamils to the area there will be more disputes over land ownership. Correspondingly there continues to be an ongoing problem with Muslims in the east feeling marginalised and ignored in the peace process. The Trincomalee district has a number of IDP

<sup>43</sup> UNHCR, 2003b and UNHCR, 2004a.

<sup>44</sup> UNHCR, 2003c.

<sup>45</sup> UNDP, 2002a.

<sup>46</sup> UNHCR, 2002, p. 334.

<sup>47</sup> UNHCR, 2003a, p. 360.

<sup>48</sup> Christian Oxenboll, Associate Statistician, Population Data Unit, UNHCR Geneva. Email to the author, 1 November 2004.

<sup>49</sup> UNHCR, 2004b, p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> Christian Oxenboll, UNHCR Geneva, email to the author.

<sup>51</sup> UNICEF, cited in Smith, 2003, p. 23.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, 2003, p. 25.

camps but the inhabitants have a much more strained relationship with the security forces than seems to be the case in Jaffna, and they are subject to recurrent beatings and harassment and restrictions on their movements. Relations with local people are also tense. With the restoration of some farmland in the area there is, however, a source of employment for IDPs for part of the year and the World Food Programme provides rations in times of under- and unemployment.<sup>53</sup> There are also a large number of both widows and orphans in the area, who constitute groups particularly in need of assistance. In the camps near Batticaloa harassment by the security forces seems to have stopped and IDPs have better nutrition and health than their Jaffna counterparts. Some work in local rice mills and in agriculture but again the work is seasonal. In the Batticaloa area as a whole domestic violence, alcohol abuse and violent crime is high.<sup>54</sup> Since March 2004 violent disputes between the LTTE's northern leadership and dissenting elements of its eastern faction have led to a marked increase in political violence and assassinations in the east, particularly in the Batticaloa area where large sections of land are under the control of the LTTE, and a climate of fear and paranoia.<sup>55</sup>

Existing research on women and gender relations in IDP camps suggests women's 'resilience, their capacity for physical and mental survival, their flexibility, and their potential to reconstruct their lives in conditions that reinforced their dependency'.<sup>56</sup> Joke Schrijvers argues that on the whole 'the day-to-day continuation of life in the camps appeared to depend more on the strengths of the women than on the men.' Many Tamil IDP women she spoke to believed that women, who experienced lower status than men anyway within their caste and class circles, were already used to experiencing dependency and restriction on their lives and thus could cope with displaced camp life more easily than the men – in some ways the men had 'lost more' than the women in terms of purpose, status and self-esteem.

Women have experienced more continuity than men in regard to their normal gender tasks (household work) and identity, but have also changed gender relations as well – many women she met were working in paid employment outside the camps, when the pass system allowed them to leave. Many men, in contrast, were depressed and/or alcohol or drug dependent.<sup>57</sup> Potentially empowering moves towards agency exercised by women have often run up against the disempowerment evident within some displaced men, resulting in resistance to these changes in women by some men who perceive their past control over decision-making and so forth being eroded by women.<sup>58</sup> High caste Tamil men, in particular, view women working 'as an affront to their egos'.<sup>59</sup> Selvy Thiruchandran, in fact, contends that it is now almost exclusively the poorest of the poor who live in the IDP camps, the lower classes and castes, and women of these classes and castes have always had a greater degree of agency and empowerment than those from higher classes and castes.<sup>60</sup> In this sense the experiences of women in the IDP camps may not present quite such a dramatic break with the past as some observers have believed, though the resistance of some men to women's initiatives does still suggest societal changes. Schrijvers, for example, met a few women from more affluent and protected families and backgrounds who had taken up paid work for the first time ever, 'stretching and even transgressing the strict boundaries of their gendered, caste- and class-determined identities'.<sup>61</sup> In terms of Muslim IDPs, changes in gender roles have also been

<sup>53</sup> Smith, 2003, pp. 28-30.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, 2003, p. 31.

<sup>55</sup> Conversations with Sri Lankans, aid workers, and UN staff, June 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Schrijvers, 1999, p. 323.

<sup>57</sup> Schrijvers 1999, pp. 323-324. See also Elek, 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Elek, 2003, pp. 55-58.

<sup>59</sup> NGO worker quoted in Elek, 2003, p. 57.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Selvy Thiruchandran, Director, Women's Education and Research Centre, Colombo, June 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Schrijvers, 1999, p. 325.

visible. Displaced Muslim women in Puttalam district, the destination of a vast influx of Muslim IDPs after their exile from the north by the LTTE in 1990, have broken tradition by taking on more responsibility for things that were previously male domains – new tasks and jobs, engaging in waged labour, moving more freely and so on.<sup>62</sup>

The steady flow to the north and east of returning IDPs, refugees and migrants is a significant issue affecting Sri Lanka's potential for development. The pressures on government services and UN and aid agency assistance for returnees are significant. Many returnees have come from refugee camps in India, landing illegally at Mannar and attempting to return to their land and homes on their own initiative, where water, sanitary and other services and infrastructure may be inadequate or non-existent and the prospects for income generation are grim. Land disputes are also likely, with the length of time many people have been away. In the latter part of 2002 and early part of 2003 the primary focus of UNHCR in the north-east was on returnees, who are immediately provided with non-relief kits including items such as a plastic sheet to be used as a roof, cooking utensils, buckets, mosquito nets, clothing and so on. After their initial arrival UNHCR works on their individual needs, and works with NGOs to target particular villages that are the site of a large number of returns, addressing the need for wells, toilets, schools, emergency housing and so on.<sup>63</sup> One of the problems faced by UN agencies in terms of development in the north-east of Sri Lanka is that because there is as yet only a ceasefire, not a political agreement, many development actors have been very slow to step in. This is particularly a problem in areas controlled by the LTTE, since such organisations are especially reluctant to engage with them. At the same time, the corresponding problem is that in LTTE areas the Tigers control everything and it is impossible to implement any programme without going through the LTTE.<sup>64</sup> The recurring dilemma in war-torn developing countries of when to start reconstruction and development in the absence of a stable peace is exacerbated in the Sri Lankan case by the fact that the rebel group actually controls certain areas of land.

One of the biggest problems faced by returnees is that of anti-personnel landmines, despite the partial de-mining done so far. The Sri Lankan army, the LTTE and the Indian Peacekeeping Force (during its brief period in Sri Lanka) have all laid their own landmines and an estimated five per cent of the population in the north-east have hand and foot disabilities as a result of landmines. The LTTE is reportedly clearing its own landmines in areas under its control and both the LTTE and the army are cooperating with the de-mining organisations. Interestingly, it seems that the LTTE's home-made 'Johnny mines' are powered by ordinary batteries and are no threat once the batteries have run down, though there are many more regular landmines than 'Johnny mines'. The Valikalam, Themmarachchi and Chavakachcheri areas of the Jaffna peninsula are the most potentially dangerous and this will become an increasing problem as more and more IDPs return home.<sup>65</sup> In August 2002 I travelled with a Tamil family back to their homes in Chavakachcheri, which they abandoned almost 20 years ago to flee the country. In light of the ceasefire they, as so many Tamil expatriates, were returning for the first time to assess the damage to their ancestral homes. Sadly their houses had been severely shelled and had at various points been occupied by the Sri Lankan army, according to local villagers who had remained in the area. The buildings are now no more than ruined shells, the well may be contaminated and the area is still riddled with mines, making any attempt at rebuilding or resettling extremely dangerous. This particular family is lucky

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<sup>62</sup> Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam, 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Jae Park, UNHCR.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Jae Park, UNHCR.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, 2003, p. 27.



enough to have the financial resources to remain in the UK, though the older generation desires to return to Chavakachcheri, but many other families are not so lucky and have no choice but to live near mined areas. Although de-mining has begun there is still a long way to go. Informal discussions in 2002 with personnel working for various de-mining organisations in Jaffna also suggest that there is a certain element of 'turf war' and problems with dividing up tasks between some of the different de-mining groups, which is nothing but a hindrance in the essential de-mining work needed in the region.

It is also important to recognise that the issue of displacement is one that illustrates the multidirectional nature of the link between armed violence – specifically, armed conflict – and poverty. While the armed violence has led directly to displacement for hundreds of thousands of people, almost invariably leading to impoverishment, the experience of displacement and poverty has in turn partially contributed to the continuation of the conflict and therefore the armed violence. While researching female combatants in the LTTE in 2002, one of the themes to emerge from my interviews with members and ex-members as being a motivation to enlist in the LTTE was the experience of displacement and the attendant problems of a loss of or decrease in entitlements such as access to education and a sustainable livelihood. Follow-up research in 2004 again revealed this theme. Kalayvily, currently LTTE Women's Political Wing leader for Jaffna, comes from a Jaffna fishing family. She was a primary school teacher and was 21 when she was displaced with her family to the Vanni. She reported experiencing poverty in the Vanni, with no steady livelihood, which contributed to her decision to join the LTTE at the age of 22.<sup>66</sup>

However, it is of course not only displacement that has led to poverty. Poverty in general is a motivating factor for many LTTE members. Two ex-LTTE members I interviewed from the Kilinochchi area both come from desperately poor families plagued by health problems. Keera's father is dead and her mother worked as a labourer to try and support the family. Keera's younger brother was born physically and mentally disabled and it has been extremely difficult for the family to make ends meet and care for him. Two of her sisters were LTTE soldiers and died in battle. Keera left school at 14 to work ploughing fields and at 16 she enlisted in the LTTE in the belief that her family would be taken care of. She is 28 now and left the LTTE in 1999 to care for her mother, who had internal injuries. She and her older brother, also an ex-LTTE member, are the main providers for the family now but Keera has a piece of shell in her head from battle, which means her employment potential is restricted due to her headaches, fainting, and inability to work in the hot sun for long periods of time.<sup>67</sup> Thangachi, also from a family of multiple LTTE members, left school at 13 to join the LTTE because she did not want to be a burden on her family and she believed the LTTE would look after them. One of her sisters, too, was an LTTE soldier killed in battle. Her father used to work in the paddy fields but after being beaten by the army he got a blood clot in his stomach, which the family believe caused him to develop cancer. Her mother has a skin disease preventing her from going outside in the sun or near fire so she cannot work outside the home. Thangachi reported being so poor as a child that after the long hot walk to school each day she always arrived dirty and smelly, for which she was punished by the teachers and teased by the other children. The shame she experienced because of this contributed to her wanting to leave and join the LTTE. She is 23 now and left the LTTE in 2000. Today, Thangachi and Keera work together on casual hire jobs as labourers, painters, masons, and roofers. They earn reasonable money when employed but the work is sporadic and both are hampered by health problems. Thangachi, too, is disabled as a result of battle – she has a serious leg injury

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Kalayvily (LTTE name), in Tamil with interpreter, Jaffna, June 2004.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Keera (pseudonym), in Tamil with interpreter, Kilinochchi, June 2004.

that needs an operation but the family cannot afford the recovery time she would need without her source of income. Her injury impedes how long she can stand for at a time and how long she can bicycle for, her only form of transport. She and her brother are also the sole providers in her family.<sup>68</sup>

## 6. Female-headed households, vulnerable women and livelihood strategies

With the large numbers of men killed or lost through migration or abandonment throughout the war there has been a significant increase in female-headed households. The phrase 'female-headed households' is in common usage within development literature and therefore is used here for clarity, but it is problematic as it implicitly assumes an autocratic 'normal' family model where the husband/father is the wage-earner and the wage-earner makes all decisions. The increase in female-headed households is seen primarily in the Tamil communities in the north-east.<sup>69</sup> Some Sinhalese communities in the south also have greater numbers of female-headed households today, as a result of the violent insurrection staged by the JVP in 1987-89.<sup>70</sup> In the Sri Lankan context this has serious and gendered implications for families, communities and society more broadly. I went to the north assuming that the primary impact of this would be witnessed in the loss of income to female-headed households, given the societal expectation that a family's main breadwinner will be a man. However, what was revealed to perhaps be more significant than this is the reaction of communities to female-headed households, at least in the Tamil areas. Tamil culture accords a very low status to widows, and women living alone without a male family member are looked upon with suspicion and suffer various forms of social exclusion. UNHCR staff in Kilinochchi said that, in their opinion, the biggest problem for widows trying to support themselves and their children is the fact that even if they do manage to find some source of income generation, people in their communities often assume that this money must come from prostitution.

One organisation in the north-east concerned with women's needs is an NGO called the Centre for Women's Development. It is funded in part from its own industries, in part by an ex-patriate Tamil Women's Organisation, and in part by international NGOs and UN agencies. Its branch in Kilinochchi is the only NGO or intergovernmental organisation in the area specifically and solely concerned with women. The Centre was founded in 1990 and assists women affected by the war and other women in need. It runs five different centres in the north-east (currently housing almost 400 people in total): for women psychologically disturbed by the war, widowed women, rape survivors, mentally handicapped women, IDP women whose husbands have abandoned them or died, orphans (both girls and boys) and victims of child labour. The Centre operates various small industries making rope and palmyrah products, pappadums, and a poultry farm. The women living in the centres work in these industries and their children attend school, with the end goal being for the women (those who are mentally and physically able) to move out and support themselves and their children. The Centre also has a Vocational Training Centre, which can be used by any women and teaches a wide variety of skills, including those not traditionally expected of women. As well as the women living in the centres, the Centre for Women's Development also visits and assists around 400 widows in the Kilinochchi area, advising them on how to generate income,

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Thangachi (pseudonym), in Tamil with interpreter, Kilinochchi, June 2004.

<sup>69</sup> see Thiruchandran, 1999.

<sup>70</sup> see Perera, 1999.

how to save some of their earnings and so on. It has also reunited some separated IDP husbands and wives, keeping a close eye on the reunited couples, and taken other husbands to court to get them to pay support money to their ex-wives and children.<sup>71</sup>

The Centre for Women's Development has had many success stories, one of whom I met and interviewed. Ranchny Radhakrisnan arrived in Kilinochchi with her family in 1990, as IDPs from Karaingar Island off the Jaffna peninsula. Her father died in 1984 and her mother was the head of their household. At that time the family had enough money to purchase land, start paddy fields and grow vegetables. Ranchny was married at 18 and widowed at 20 in 1994, while pregnant, when her husband 'disappeared' after being taken in by the army. After her mother died in 1998 Ranchny's sister and her husband took over the land to work and Ranchny went to the Centre for Women's Development for assistance. The Centre helped Ranchny to become trained in motorbike, bicycle and sewing machine repair while her son boarded at an orphanage for a year. She was the first woman at the Centre to learn these skills, normally seen as men's work, and with financial support from the Centre she established her own bicycle and motorcycle repair shop in a rural area. Initially she encountered resistance from locals, who felt it was not an appropriate job for a woman, and harassment from men who saw her, as a lone woman, as fair game.<sup>72</sup> Despite this, she ultimately managed to establish herself in her community and gain acceptance, she has steady work and is supporting her son's education. She hopes to one day buy out the shop herself and is saving for that. Others have been less successful. There are some villages in the north and east, particularly badly affected by war violence, which are almost entirely composed of female-headed households. I wanted to visit one of these villages in the Pooneryn area to talk to women about their experiences of the war and how they are sustaining themselves and their families. In the village in Pooneryn that I was told about, some of the women are war widows but many had been living in de facto marriages with IDP men who later abandoned them. The women are in a very vulnerable position and are a politically contentious issue at the local level, which unfortunately meant that I was unable to visit the village as this would have caused problems for local UN staff with the LTTE.<sup>73</sup>

One of the realities of the LTTE-controlled areas is that the organisation is involved in every aspect of life there, from the shops and businesses they own right up to their parallel political, legal and judicial structures. As previously noted, this has been problematic from the point of view of governments and NGOs. In the Kilinochchi area, for example, when working on any programmes or policies regarding reconstruction and development, the UN and all other agencies have to work through the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO) which is essentially the development wing of the LTTE. TRO has done some excellent and commendable work with local communities and seems to have a good record of employing, assisting and training women, which is unsurprising given the LTTE's stated commitment to feminism. I visited the Rural Rehabilitation and Development Organisation in the Kilinochchi area, which is a subsidiary of TRO and works providing micro-credit for impoverished locals to start their own businesses and enterprises. All the staff are women, including the head.

Despite TRO's good work it is perhaps understandable that other actors are hesitant to engage with them because of their links to the Tigers. The issue of orphanages illustrates the

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Krishnakumar Suthrsini, Executive Director, and Mrs Kamala, Programme Director, Centre for Women's Development, in Tamil with interpreter, Kilinochchi, June 2004.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Ranchny Radhakrisnan, in Tamil with interpreter, Kilinochchi, June 2004.

<sup>73</sup> Unattributed interviews for the security of interviewees.

ambivalences here. TRO runs five orphanages in the Kilinochchi area (and others elsewhere), caring for around 1200 children in total. Some of the children were abandoned by their parents, some are there because their families were too poor to care for them, some have parents who 'disappeared', but most are war orphans whose parents died as a direct result of the war.<sup>74</sup> Some of the youngest children I met during a visit to one such orphanage, Kurukulam, were orphaned at only one day old. Many of their fathers were fishermen, an extremely dangerous occupation during the war, and were killed by the Sri Lankan navy. Other parents were killed when the army came to their homes or when they fled as displaced people.<sup>75</sup> Kurukulam Orphanage (primarily for girls but with some very small boys) seems to have achieved a lot with very little. It was established in 1954 but has been run by the TRO since 1991, funded by diaspora TRO branches. The children are clean, well-fed, lively and active, are given affection by the staff and are educated both in ordinary local schools and with supplementary lessons in the orphanage. Most of the young women study up to A Levels and one was recently accepted to Jaffna University – the second from the orphanage. However, the other side of the issue is the concern of some people that orphanages that are effectively LTTE-run may provide the Tigers with a ready pool of new combatants, should the need arise. Certainly the LTTE has a history of recruitment drives at schools and conversations with local people suggest many Tamils are very aware of and concerned about the vulnerability of children in both orphanages and schools to LTTE recruitment or forcible conscription. This is a justifiable concern given the widespread use of child soldiers by the Tigers.

## 7. Recommendations

Rather than providing any drawn out summary or conclusions here, some recommendations are given for action on the part of the Sri Lankan government, intergovernmental organisations, development agencies and NGOs.

- Demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants is a vitally important issue. In the design of further demobilisation and reintegration programmes, awkward and potentially vulnerable categories of ex-combatants need to be targeted as well as those more immediately visible: deserters from both the army and the LTTE, ex-members of the Home Guards and the National Armed Reserve, and Tamil state-funded paramilitary groups such as EPDP and TELO. Related to this is the problem of increased rates of common crime which seems likely to be causally linked to the availability of SALW and the lack of reintegration programmes and employment opportunities. All these causes, therefore, need to be addressed.
- Reintegration programmes also need to address gendered issues in a more radical way including, though not limited to, grappling with the needs of female ex-combatants in an emancipatory way rather than reinforcing expected gender roles and inequalities.
- The predicted high rates of domestic and sexual violence in the conflict zones needs to be investigated by government and development agencies and greater action needs to be taken to combat this violence, starting at a basic level with organised and committed efforts by the police to record detailed and useful statistics on the incidence of such violence. Existing local initiatives that combat domestic and sexual violence,

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Mr Ravi, in Tamil with interpreter, Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO) Head Office, Kilinochchi, June 2004.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Akila, in Tamil with interpreter, Kurukulam Children's Home, Kilinochchi area, June 2004.

such as Suriya Women's Development Centre in Batticaloa, should be supported and funded.

- The steps some IDP women have made and continue to make towards greater agency and empowerment should be encouraged and supported by development agencies, but ongoing dialogue with IDP men is a necessary part of this process to ensure that women do not suffer a backlash from men in their own communities.
- Problems of social exclusion and stigma and lack of access to sustainable livelihoods and other entitlements remain very real for lone women and female-headed households in Sri Lanka. A more open and honest dialogue about these women, *with* these women, is necessary if any progress is to be made. Organisations such as the Centre for Women's Development that help women establish livelihoods, including training them in unconventional skills, should be supported.

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## Selected interviews

- Interview with Steve Ainsworth, First Secretary (Development Advisor), British High Commission, Colombo, June 2004.
- Interview with Akila, in Tamil with interpreter, Kurukulam Children's Home, Kilinochchi area, June 2004.
- Interview with Kalayvily (LTTE name), LTTE Women's Political Wing leader for Jaffna, in Tamil with interpreter, Jaffna, June 2004.
- Interview with Keera (pseudonym), ex-LTTE combatant, in Tamil with interpreter, Kilinochchi, June 2004.
- Interview with Shantha Kulasekera, National Programme Officer, International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Colombo, June 2004.
- Interview with Jae Park, Associate Field Officer (Protection), UNHCR Satellite Office, Kilinochchi, June 2004.
- Interview with Ranchny Radhakrisnan, in Tamil with interpreter, Kilinochchi, June 2004.
- Interview with Mr Ravi, in Tamil with interpreter, Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO) Head Office, Kilinochchi, June 2004.

Interview with Krishnakumar Suthrsini, Executive Director, and Mrs Kamala, Programme Director, Centre for Women's Development, in Tamil with interpreter, Kilinochchi, June 2004.

Interview with Thangachi (pseudonym), ex-LTTE combatant, in Tamil with interpreter, Kilinochchi, June 2004.

Interview with Selvy Thiruchandran, Director, Women's Education and Research Centre, Colombo, June 2004.